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National Intelligence Bulletin

State Dept. review completed

DIA review(s) completed.

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September 24, 1975

No 669

25X1

Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A028100010039-7

Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A028100010039-7

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A028100010039-7

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PANAMA

The stoning of the US embassy yesterday was apparently not a government-sponsored act, but it nevertheless will probably be used by Torrijos, the country's strongman, to buttress his contention that popular patience with the treaty talks is wearing thin.

The approximately 800 students who broke most of the windows in the embassy were members of several radical groups not under the government's control. The students also reportedly stoned the Panamanian Foreign Ministry as part of a continuing protest against recent remarks by top US officials concerning the canal negotiations. The students also accused the government of complicity with the US in the talks. National Guard troops at the US embassy prevented the students from entering the grounds, but they did not halt the stoning.

Torrijos and leaders of the National Guard probably still believe they can control the general tempo of student protests, which are highly visible manifestations of the popular impatience which Torrijos frequently cites. Further demonstrations, with possible government foreknowledge and a potential for unplanned escalation, are likely.

Probably as part of his general campaign to increase pressure on the US, Torrijos made an unscheduled trip to Bogota Monday to see Colombian President Lopez on the eve of the latter's departure for Washington. Torrijos hopes that demarches by Latin American leaders stressing the need for a new treaty, so as to avoid a popular explosion and a souring of US - Latin American relations, will prompt US concessions during the canal negotiations.

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LAOS

The US embassy may be the target of demonstrations this week.

The immediate cause of the latest friction is a demand by recently discharged embassy guards for additional severance pay; they are threatening to demonstrate at the embassy gates tomorrow. Although only 14 guards are involved, they could be joined by Pathet Lao sympathizers.

With the Pathet Lao fully in control in Vientiane, renewed demonstrations at the embassy would suggest that the communists are intent on further moves against the US diplomatic presence.

Communist-inspired harassment of the embassy stopped in late June, but the attitude of the communist authorities toward continued relations with the US has been ambiguous.

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FRANCE

French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac has shown in his 16 months in office a talent for capitalizing on opportunities to increase his own standing. As matters now stand, he is regarded by growing numbers of voters as a potential successor to the presidency.

Chirac has succeeded not only because of his own abilities and a top-flight staff, but also because no rival exists within President Giscard's camp—except the President himself.

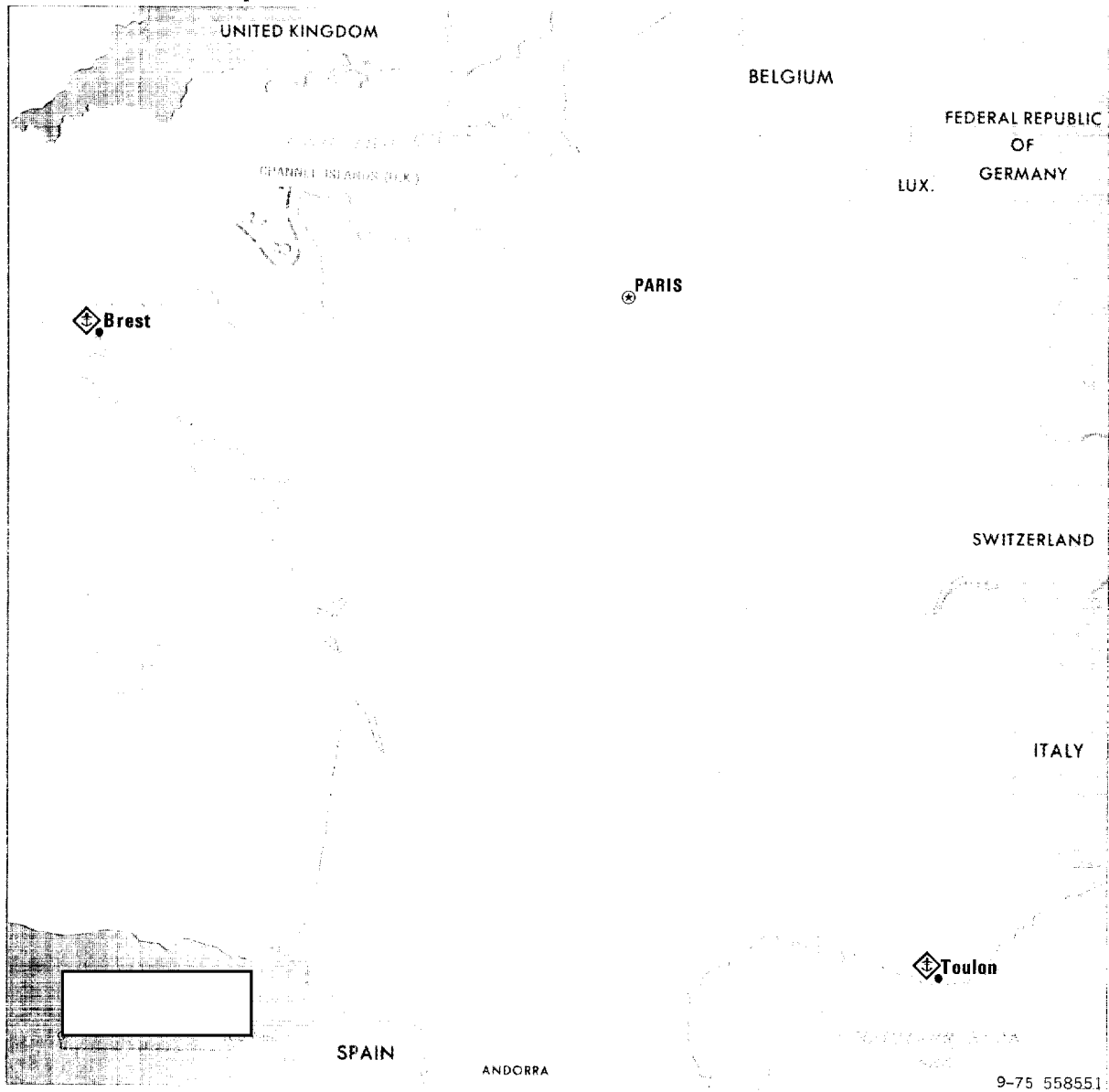
Only 42, Chirac has identified himself with those who are tired of worn-out political theories. He cultivates a reputation as a problem-solver who is willing to borrow leftist and liberal ideas if they will help keep France strong, stable, and socially progressive. To some, Chirac is tenacious, tough, pragmatic, frank, and intelligent; his critics see him as mechanical, boundlessly ambitious, unprincipled, and insensitive.

He has been largely successful in avoiding no-win issues such as the unrest on Corsica, which has brought heavy criticism to Interior Minister Poniatowski, Giscard's right-hand man. On the other hand, where points are to be gained, the Prime Minister has on occasion taken the political spotlight from the minister directly involved.

Chirac's energy and an ability to grasp the political dimension as well as the technical details of issues have made him both a strong ally and a potential rival of Giscard. When the President rejected his advice last spring to take early action to get the French economy back on its feet, Chirac exploited the situation by leaks bolstering press charges that Giscard and his economics minister were doing too little too late.

Still, Chirac's public relationship with the President seems on solid ground; the Prime Minister is careful to avoid direct expressions of disloyalty. An open break is unlikely, unless the political situation changes radically, because both men would be hurt. Giscard needs Chirac to keep Gaullists in line for the next legislative election, which must be held before March 1978. For his part, Chirac, with the next presidential election six years off, has no need to rush to establish a more independent political image.

French Shift Emphasis to Mediterranean



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FRANCE

The French have begun implementing their previously announced reorganization of naval forces.

The plan, which the navy formulated over a year ago, calls for major shifts in the Atlantic and Mediterranean fleets. The key aims of the shift are to concentrate France's naval strike force in the Mediterranean and increase its antisubmarine warfare assets in the Atlantic.

The aircraft carrier Clemenceau is moving from the Atlantic port of Brest to a new home port at Toulon. The aircraft carrier Foch, as well as a guided-missile cruiser and two guided-missile frigates, will also be relocated at Toulon next year. Five antisubmarine warfare units are to be shifted from Toulon to the Atlantic.

The shift probably reflects France's desire to increase its influence in the Mediterranean area—particularly in light of that sea's importance as a route for transporting Middle East oil.

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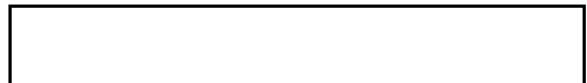
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